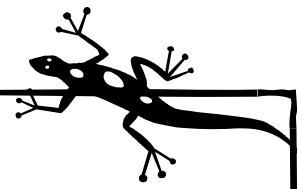


# Nature Corner



## LAH Environmental Design Committee

### Western Fence Lizard – Fighting Lyme Disease

If you live in an area with an abundance of deer, you may want to say “thank you” to your common Western Fence Lizard. They help you; actually, help humanity to fight Lyme disease.

According to research scientists from UC Berkeley, “The lizard’s blood contains a substance – probably a heat sensitivity protein – that kills the Lyme disease spirochete, a kind of bacterium.” This protein apparently leaches into the mid-gut of infected nymphal ticks as the tick feeds and destroys spirochetes stored there, permanently cleansing the ticks before they mature to adults and this prevents Lyme disease.

#### Description

The Western Fence Lizard measures 3 1/2 inches (snout-vent length), and is about six inches in total length. Coloration ranges from light gray to black with dark blotches on the back that continue down the tail. Male Western Fence Lizards have bright blue, sometimes greenish, bellies, and the undersides of their legs are yellow. Females lack this decorative coloring. The scales are keeled and somewhat spiny.

#### Build a Shelter for the Lizard

Try building a small rock pile or wood and stick pile to shelter these useful blue-belly lizards from predators.

Editor’s Note: According to the Environmental Design Committee: The study was done by two scientists: Robert Lane, professor of insect biology, UC Berkeley in collaboration with Gary Quistad a UC Berkeley researcher. Their work was funded by the National Institute of Health. The Scientists first reported their work in the February issue of the Journal of Parasitology 1998. Reference: Kathleen Scalise, California Agriculture Volume 52, Number 2.



## Open Space Committee

### An Evening with OWLS



An Evening with Owls Event drew a crowd of over 125 residents, including many families with school children who were interested in learning about these fascinating birds of prey.

Presenter Karen Hoyt of *Sky Hunters Environmental Education* explained how these birds help create a balanced ecosystem by controlling rodents and eliminating the sick and weak. Barn owls are voracious predators of rodents, eating thousands every year. An owl family with 5 young can consume 3000 rodents during a single breeding season!

Having barn owls in the neighborhood can control, but not entirely eradicate, rat and gopher populations. However, attempting to poison the remaining rodents can be counterproductive, as these may then be eaten by the owls and other natural predators. This in turn can lead to the reduction in predator population and a commensurate increase in the rodent population. A more effective way to deal with rodents is to employ a humane animal control business that will “animal proof” your home, sealing entry and exit holes, roof and exhaust vents, installing chimney caps, sealing off decks and porches, etc.

Additional information on how to encourage owls to locate in your neighborhood will be available at Earth Day 2007 (April 22) at Westwind Barn, where Karen Hoyt will again be on hand with her birds of prey and educational materials.

The next program in of the Open Space Committee’s *Living with Wildlife* series will take place in the fall.